
Chapter I

A Guide to eCourse Management: The Stakeholders' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Web-based education (WBE) and training is growing by leaps and bounds, and the market is expected to reach almost 28.6 billion by the year 2006 (IDC, 2001). Technological advancements and student demands have necessitated a shift from a “brick and mortar” synchronous environment to a “click and learn” asynchronous environment. Students are demanding anytime, anyplace accessibility, and universities are obliging by bringing education to students. The instructor’s role is changing from “lecturing” to “facilitating,” and the student’s role is changing from “recipient” to “participant.” These virtual students require virtual convenience and are opting for a “complete” online education, from admission to graduation. In this chapter, the steps involved in Web education, from three major stakeholders’ perspectives—the faculty, the student, and the technical personnel—are discussed, and ways of providing online conveniences are discussed, based on the author’s experience.

INTRODUCTION

Anytime, anyplace access is the essence of Web-based education (WBE). Universities are providing education on the students’ terms, whether at the student’s home, workplace, or other convenient location (Benbunan-Fich, 2002; Ducker, 2001). Students are becoming much like the customers, and universities are becoming much like the businesses competing for these customers. Many for-profit and traditional universities are trying to be among the first to provide Web-based teaching. It is estimated that by the end of this year, almost 200 universities will be offering online courses in some form or another (IDC, 2001, 2002). WBE

is diffusing across disciplines, educational levels, and global boundaries. It is expanding into many traditional disciplines of business education, including finance, accounting, management, and marketing, and also into nonbusiness disciplines, like the political sciences, history, arts, and engineering. WBE is not confined to western countries. Many third-world countries are recognizing WBE as an economical alternative to reach the masses and are jumping on the WBE bandwagon. Open universities of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan are examples of this. These universities are trying to reach all classes of people, particularly those living in villages and remote areas. Even the United Nations, in its report (October, 2002) on disarmament and nonproliferation education and training, recommended using such techniques as distance learning, the Internet, and videoconferencing, as well as cost-efficient and cost-effective media such as CD-ROMs for educating the masses.

Like any new product, WBE is going through its own product life cycle (Day, 1981). In the late 1990s when WBE was emerging, there were few adopters, and WBE was in the first stage of the product life cycle. This was an experimental phase, where emphasis was on “defining” the product and making it technically “feasible.” Only a few universities, such as the University of Phoenix, University of Maryland at University Park (UMUP), and the University of Baltimore (UB) were experimenting with WBE. In this initial phase, the WBE product was more technology driven. As students saw the benefits of WBE and started moving from traditional face-to-face learning to WBE, many entrepreneurs also started venturing into it. Many for-profit universities began to emerge, forcing traditional universities to come on board (*San Jose Mercury News*, 1999). The University of Phoenix, with virtually no physical presence, captured a large online education market. The momentum continued, and more and more players surfaced, moving WBE into the second phase of its life cycle.

In the second phase, WBE is becoming more demand driven. As competition is growing, universities are streamlining operations, consolidating offerings, and creating strategic partnerships. Efficiency is becoming key, and universities are looking at the cost, value, and (above all) the quality of such offerings. However, all is not rosy for for-profit universities in this phase. Education requires recognition, value, and accreditation from appropriate world bodies, and many for-profits are folding due to the lack of quality, name recognition, and, ultimately, lack of capital. In the second phase, universities are following an organizational strategy to approach “customers,” which means paying closer attention to the students. Consolidation is taking place, and eventually, “few” will survive to the third phase of WBE.

Because students are like customers, their satisfaction is important, and they are demanding online education with online convenience. Universities are recognizing this and differentiating their product by revamping curriculums, offering 24/7 online support services and streamlining operations. Effectiveness and efficiency are becoming key to survival, creating challenges for administrators, faculty, and support personnel to provide seamless operations. Based on the author’s experiences and discussions with other Web faculty, we provide guidelines for managing Web courses from the stakeholders’ (student, faculty, and technical personnel) perspectives.

WEB-BASED EDUCATION

WBE is available anytime, anyplace, to anyone—irrespective of time and distance. Many researchers (www.alnresearch.org) have called this asynchronous learning. Typically,

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